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ABSTRACT

An extensive inservice training program involved principals, teachers, teacher-aides, and parents. It becan in 1970 with a summer workshop, and then throughout the following school year, substitute teachers were provided 1 day each week to release the teachers from school to attend classes at Portland State University. The program was monitored and evaluated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Rating scales completed by parents and teachers indicated that the content was well received and found useful. Much training was carried out in the observation and analysis of children's reading performance. Teachers were also trained to administer and analyze reading tests and to examine their instructional reading materials. There were also discussions on student grouping and classroom organization. This resulted in the emergence of eclectic programs in each room and a diversity of classroom management practices, as well as a piecemeal approach to planning. The persistent problems concerned substitute teachers--teachers reported dissatisfaction with their performance. Also, the workshop session was often preempted by other activities. Teachers did not take active participation in the training activities, nor did they have time to implement the suggestions in their classrooms. However, parents who participated played a satisfactory role in helping the teachers. (AW)

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A Released-Time In-Service Training Program in the Teaching of Reading.

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Introduction

The Portland Project is an extensive in-service training program in the teaching of reading. The program began with a summer workshop in August, 1970, is continuing throughout the 1970-71 school year, and will continue throughout the 1971-72 school year. It is attempting to improve the teaching of reading in four Portland public elementary schools. It is innovative, in contrast to conventional summer and after-school in-service programs, inasmuch as it includes

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principals, teachers, teacher-aides, and parents; and inasmuch as it provides substitute teachers one day a week, every Thursday, throughout the year to release the teachers from school to attend classes at the university. The principals, parents, and aides are paid; the teachers were paid for the summer only and they earn college credit. The four principals and the twenty aides participated in the summer workshop only. The thirty-six teachers and nineteen parents have participated throughout the year. Altogether, a total of just over one thousand children are taught by program participants. The program staff is drawn from the university and the public schools. It consists of a director, an associate director, three instructors who also supervise, an instructor for the parents, and a media specialist.

The four schools were chosen on the basis of need from disadvantaged areas in widely separate parts of the city. The population of one school is 70% black. The populations of the other schools are predominantly white. One school has a small percentage of oriental children. All four schools are in relatively unstable, transient areas.

The program is funded by the U.S. Office of Education, directed by Portland State University, and monitored and evaluated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

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Content and Format of the Program

Two prime requirements were that the program should be both systematic in its presentation of content and sufficiently flexible to be responsive to the teachers on-the-spot needs as they developed in the classroom. These were met by creating a program of instruction which provided time for the systematic presentation of information and training activities; a program of supervision which gave feedback to the staff and individual assistance by staff members to program participants; and a program of workshop activities which provided time for the discussion of emergent problems, the examination of materials, and individual and group study. General sessions were planned for all of the participants followed by separate workshops for teachers, aides, and parents.

The program of instruction was organized for the most part around university courses so that a comprehensive program would be presented throughout the year and so that efforts could be concentrated in a specific direction each quarter. The courses were: Basic Techniques in the Teaching of Reading; Teaching the Language Arts and their Relationship to the Teaching of Reading; Diagnostic Teaching of Reading; and Children's Literature. The particular courses were chosen so that attention could be paid to a detailed analysis of reading instruction in a setting which recognized the importance of children's interests and purposes, human values

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in the reading program, and the close relationships among all of the language arts.

When the major topics and format had been decided, work on specific behavioral and process objectives began with the assistance of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Pencil and paper pre-tests and post-tests were constructed to be administered to teachers and parents each quarter. Performance criteria for training tasks were specified. Observational schedules were constructed to record and evaluate changes in certain characteristics of teacher performance. Plans were made to collect information from current and previous years from the public schools annual testing programs in order to make comparisons and evaluate children's achievements in reading.

The realities of the situation in the schools exerted a strong influence, as they should, upon the content of the program. Before the program began, most of the decisions about text books and materials for the school year had already been made. The program did not set out to limit its training to the use of one set of instructional materials. Nevertheless, it had to begin with an understanding of the purposes of the materials already in the classrooms. Taking the classroom as the starting point, the program attempted to train teachers to assess student's needs, formulate objectives, plan appropriate activities, use available

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materials effectively, and supplement those materials when necessary.

The program of supervision began with instructional sessions for the staff. The members of the supervisory staff learned techniques of objective classroom observation and developed a rationale for supervisory activities. Observation schedules were constructed to enable supervisors to obtain objective records of classroom activities. Ways of using these records to assist teachers in the analysis and subsequent improvement of their own performances were discussed and prepared for use in the schools.

Operation of the Program

The program as a whole has functioned very much according to plan. Some deviations have occurred, some defects in the design have appeared, and a few problems have arisen. The most persistent problems have been about substitute teachers. In some schools, particularly where care was taken to obtain the same substitute teacher regularly each week, and to prepare her thoroughly before the first session and for each of the subsequent sessions, the difficulties have been minimized. But in one school, where no such measures were taken, teachers have reported dissatisfaction with the performance of their succession of temporary substitutes. Two teachers discussed withdrawing from the program and were persuaded to remain only when their school was able to obtain

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a regular substitute to their satisfaction. Even when substitute teachers have worked well, some teachers have reported that the loss of one whole school day each week has prevented them from accomplishing as much as they had hoped with their classes this year.

Rating scales completed by parents and by teachers indicate that the content has been well received and found to be useful. Supervisors have noted that teachers are making regular use of suggestions from the program in their classrooms. However, program expectations have not been entirely fulfilled. The workshop sessions which were intended primarily to be responsive to emergent needs and available for group discussion and individual study have frequently been pre-empted by extended training activities, or by examination and discussion of teaching materials. These activities have been valuable but have cut into an important part of the program. Many of the training activities have required active participation by the teachers during program sessions, but the activities for the most part have been initiated and directed by program staff rather than by participants.

The program was over-optimistic about the number of activities that it could present and expect to find used effectively in the classroom. This was particularly true of oral language activities. Many topics were presented and discussed and training activities were conducted, but the teachers did not have time to implement more than a small

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proportion of the suggestions in their classrooms. For example, the relationships between children's creative dramatics and reading comprehension were discussed, and training activities in creative dramatics were conducted throughout one of the workshop sessions. Though a few teachers introduced some creative dramatics successfully, it was apparent that most teachers needed much more assistance than the program had given them if they were to develop and sustain creative dramatics in their classroom confidently.

Much training was carried out in the observation and analysis of children's reading performances. The teachers were trained in the administration and interpretation of an informal reading inventory, and they constructed and used learning-rate, learning-methods, and specific diagnostic reading tests. Much work was done to train teachers to examine their basal and supplementary instructional reading materials and use them selectively. Problems of grouping children and of classroom organization were discussed, but no specific training activities were conducted on these topics. An anticipated result of all of these activities is the emergence of eclectic programs in each room and a diversity of classroom management practices throughout the program. An unanticipated result has been what appears in a few instances to be a piecemeal approach to planning, lacking sufficient regard for continuity. Perhaps this is the greatest hazard of

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an eclectic program. Perhaps it is a necessary stage in a teacher's development if she is willing to try out and become familiar with a variety of instructional materials. Perhaps it is a symptom of poor planning. Or again, it might simply be the result of the input of too many suggestions and too much information without proper regard for the particular needs of different classrooms. The supervisors gained the impression at times that activities were being attempted in classrooms, sometimes unsuccessfully, and were being prematurely discarded.

The supervision model has proved difficult to implement. To a limited extent, objective observations of teachers' performances have been made and discussed with each teacher. Time for individual discussions with teachers after school is hard to find, and it has not been found useful to try to add individual conference time to the end of the released-time day. Field supervisors have spent much time working with children and giving demonstration lessons in classrooms rather than limiting their role to one of observing, discussing and making suggestions. This emphasis has been well accepted by the teachers and may have been entirely appropriate at this stage of the program. Nevertheless, it has been achieved at the expense of a planned, objective analysis of teacher performance. If an aim of the training program is for the teachers to develop increased independence, it may be desirable as the program continues, to reduce the amount of demonstration and to find ways of increasing

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analyze selected elements of her own performance, and make modifications when needed.

The Program for Parents

Since the program began, the parent group has increased from eleven to nineteen. Throughout the school year, the parents have attended the major instructional presentation each Thursday along with the teachers, and have attended workshop sessions of their own. In the latter part of the year, time spent in the workshop sessions has been cut down to allow more time to be spent in the schools assisting the teachers in traditional and innovative ways. They have helped in such diverse ways as reading aloud to children, helping a teacher produce a classroom play, preparing art materials, collecting seatwork exercises, and tutoring individuals and small groups.

Sample logs of parent activities collected from teachers and the principals show that the parents have saved teachers' time at very little cost to the teachers' time and have done things that otherwise would not have been done. On average, each teacher has received approximately one hour and fifteen minutes help from a parent each week. During the current quarter, three formal observations of each parent's work with children are being recorded. Data collected by means of a critical incident technique indicate general satisfaction with the role the parents have played.

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Evaluation

The focus of the evaluation has been primarily upon changes in teacher knowledge, changes in teacher performance, and effectiveness of various training activities. The overall aim of all of the program activities is the improvement of children's reading and language. The problems of attributing children's progress in reading to program activities are extremely complex. Many variables are likely to influence children's performances. On the one hand, an extensive program draws attention rather dramatically to the teaching of reading and tends to generate a Hawthorne effect. On the other hand, the released time and the program activities themselves take some of the teachers' time away from the classroom. Additionally, changes in basal reading materials and in the organization of the reading program within the schools have taken place this year, and these can be hypothesized to have had an effect upon children's reading performances. Schools in a transient neighborhood also present special problems of teaching and evaluation. As one principal expresses it, "Teaching reading in this school is like teaching reading to a parade". Considering the limited inferences that could be made about the program's effect upon children's performances during the current year, short of employing a disproportionately complex and time-consuming evaluation design, decisions were made

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to limit the evaluation of children's performances to gross comparisons of this year's achievement with that of previous years based on information obtained from the Portland Public Schools annual testing program. The comparisons are currently being made.

Much more important than children's progress in reading this year are the effects that the in-service training will have upon the children in the many classes taught by program participants in the years to come. It is beyond the scope of this program to obtain information of this kind. By the end of the year, data collected will enable statements to be made about reading performances of some groups of children during the period of teachers' in-service training. It will not reveal which training activities and which teacher competencies have the greatest effect upon children's performances. This program, like other teacher training programs, is based more upon reasoned judgments of informed people rather than upon hard evidence of effective practices.

Future Plans

The program will continue throughout the 1970-71 school year. A new group of parents will be recruited and a program for aides will be offered monthly throughout the year. A workshop consisting of five or six half day seminars for principals will also be conducted. One group of teachers

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will be identified and trained as in-service leaders for the school district. Released time will again be provided for the teachers but for half a day instead of a whole day per week. Much more emphasis will be placed upon identifying and solving of specific, emergent problems rather than upon the systematic presentation of a predetermined body of information and training activities. The training activities next year will include analysis of videotapes from the classrooms, the setting of individual goals and the charting of individual progress of each teacher. The training activities this year have increased teachers' knowledge of diagnostic techniques, of language teaching activities, and of instructional materials. The emphasis next year will be upon making more effective use of this knowledge.